

# The Republican.

No. 9, VOL. 10.] LONDON, Friday, Sept. 3, 1824. [PRICE 6d.

## FURTHER CORRESPONDENCE WITH MR. WILLIAM FITTON, OF ROYTON, LANCASHIRE.

TO MR. R. CARLILE, DORCHESTER GAOL.

SIR,

Royton, Lancashire, June 21, 1824.

ALTHOUGH several months have elapsed since the publication of my last letter to you, and your reply thereto, yet, in the whole of this time, I have never entirely lost sight of the subject, but have been determined to make some observations on your reply to me, the first favourable opportunity that offered itself.

I must confess that I feel very considerable surprise at the beginning of your last letter to me, where you accuse me, of rather wishing to fall in with the strongest current of opinion, than to discover and support the truth. I have not, at present, in my possession, the copy of my last letter to you, and therefore, perhaps, I ought to be very cautious in giving a positive contradiction to this part of your reply. Yet thus far I think I can venture to say, that, I believe, you will have great difficulty in proving from my letter, the correctness of the opinion thus expressed by you.

I believe, that what I did say was this: that the general opinion of mankind was against you, so very strongly, with respect to the being of a God; that all your efforts to bring them over to your way of thinking would be perfectly useless; and I inferred from this, that as far as uniformity of opinion was a proof of any thing, it was, in the absence of some demonstration to the contrary, a proof of the truth.

Now you are fully aware, that there has, on this subject, been a very great uniformity of opinion; you know that while different systems of philosophy have each in their turn prevailed; and while different creeds of religion have in various parts of the globe, and at various times been acknowledged, yet on this one subject there has been no difference of opinion. The Jew, the Mahometan, and the Christian; the sun-burnt African,

Printed and Published by R. Carlile, 84, Fleet Street.

and the frozen inhabitants of the north, however opposed to each other their different creeds may be in other respects, yet, on this one point, there is the most perfect agreement<sup>1</sup>. This being the case then, I ask, whether we are not reasonably justified in regarding this uniformity of opinion, as a proof of the truth of that opinion, especially when you yourself acknowledge, that no positive proof to the contrary can be adduced<sup>2</sup>? I have now, I think, satisfied you, that my object is not so much to fall in with the strongest current of opinion, as it is to come at the truth; and that when I refer you to the generally established opinions of mankind, I do not do it because they are current opinions, but because, under existing circumstances, I think, they are to be regarded as proofs of the truth<sup>3</sup>.

I will now call your attention to another part of your reply, with a view to correct another error into which you have been led, and then proceed to make some remarks, on what I regard as the more important parts of your answer. I am here alluding to what you say, you have been informed respecting my having been more active in calumniating, than in examining the principles and tendency of your writings.

However I may differ with you in matters relating to theology, I have too high an opinion of your moral honesty to suppose that you would have said this, without having, as you thought pretty good authority for so doing. But, Sir, I can assure you, that your authority, good as you may have thought, it to be, is in this case, worth just nothing at all; in other words, the charge against me, is neither more nor less than a gross fabrication of, as I suppose, those who caused to be transmitted to you, the information. If that charge be true they have after this nothing to do *but to prove it*, and thereby successfully to retort the charge of falsehood upon myself. It must however be observed, that a gross assertion, made by some person in the dark, is not to be regarded as proof. Let the charge be distinctly and tangibly made out; let it be properly signed by the names of the individuals who make it, and dated from their places of

<sup>1</sup> As far as they have been alike ignorant.

R. C.

<sup>2</sup> There is all the negative proof that can be given against any other proposition.

R. C.

<sup>3</sup> This sort of argument is what the rhetoricians call *arguing in a circle*, all ways coming to the same point. Not because it is the current opinion, but because it is the general opinion, which is the current opinion.

R. C.



abode, let all this be done, and I am ready to meet it; if not, I do not see how I can be reasonably called upon to reply to it. I fairly expose myself by signing my name, and place of abode to what I write. They fight from behind a masked battery in with-holding both the one and the other, from the public. Let them, I again say, act in a fair and open manner, and I shall have no hesitation to meet them.

Having said thus much, on this part of the subject, I shall now proceed to remark on what I look upon, as by far the most important part of your reply. You make a great number of observations again, on what I say respecting Deity, but nothing which, in my mind, goes to overthrow the reasoning I have used, or at least the opinions which I hold, on this part of the subject of our discussion. You do indeed fall into a most palpable error, as to my meaning respecting the nature and freedom of worship; an error which I will now, before I proceed any farther, correct. You say, when speaking of homage to God, that you "rather suspect, that the homage which you," meaning me "would exact, is an *expensive homage, a continuation of that system which constitutes religion a trade for idle men to profit by; and by which the industrious are taxed and the poor kept poor.*" How you should ever come to entertain such an opinion as this, or how you should come to express it upon paper, I cannot form any idea whatever. But of this I feel confident, that nothing contained in any communication from me will fairly bear out any such meaning. For in the very letter, to which, what you here say is meant as a reply, this is as distinctly disclaimed as words can disclaim it. I there say "I wish you not to suppose, that I advocate the union of church and state establishments, as they exist in this country. I do no such thing. I am aware that such union is hurtful both in a religious and political point of view." Here is as complete a disclaimer of the inference drawn by you, as you can well have. You call upon me to renounce the idea of compulsory support of the church. If I will do this, you say, there will no longer be any difference, on this head, between us. Now, Mr. Carlile, in point of fact, I cannot renounce this idea, for I never entertained it, I have always contended for the most extended freedom of religious opinion and worship. And I certainly cannot help feeling some surprise, that you should, after reading the preceding quotation, have drawn from it the inference which you evidently have. In real truth, I advocate the doctrine of the being of a God, because I really believe such

a doctrine to be well founded, because, I cannot at all otherwise account for the phenomena which I see around me<sup>4</sup>. And I contend for the propriety of a belief in God, because I believe it to be true, and because I believe it is calculated, by restraining the bad passions of mankind, to promote the cause of morality and of virtue. And with this observation I shall for the present at least close this part of the subject.

You reason at some length, with a view to shew that my opinions respecting the nature of the human mind, are not well founded—and in support of the opinions which you hold, you again adduce the authority of Mr. Lawrence, and Dr. Gall. You seem to look upon it that their authority should in a great measure, be regarded as decisive on this question. This, however, I am not as yet, by any means, disposed fully to admit. I know that Dr. Gall's theory is ingenious; but this, you are aware, does not necessarily prove it to be true. Ingenuity and truth are sometimes widely different, and if I mistake, not they are so, in the present case. As connected with this part of our discussion, you give your view of the nature of the human mind, intending thereby, to demonstrate its materiality. We have before had occasion to speak of the effects produced by the operations of Chemistry. I will again refer you to this science, to shew you, why I differ with you in opinion on this part of the subject of our discussion. I need not tell you that by means of chemical agency, we have it in our power to produce a great variety of compounds, out of a new line of simple elementary substances. We have it also in our power to decompose these compounds, and reduce them again to their original simple substances. As for instance, we can by means of uniting oxygen and hydrogen, in their proper quantities, produce common water; we can, by means of an union between oxygen and nitrogen, produce atmospheric air, we can also, by means of chemical agency separate their component parts, and reduce them to their original simple states. So far we can go. But we cannot, by any combination of elements, give a permanent power or property, which is in its nature really different, from the powers or properties, which these elements in their separate state possess. Hence it is that I infer the immate-

<sup>4</sup> Can you account any the better for referring these phenomena to what you call God? Are you the wiser, when you have your idol?  
R. C.



riality of the human mind. Vitality, connected with the intellectual properties of man, appears to be essentially different from the material elements of which the human body is compounded<sup>5</sup>. If it were not it would be difficult sometimes to account for the phenomena of death as it occurs in some individuals. If the mind were a material substance, necessarily arising out of the material body, it would remain joined to the body so long as the material particles of the body were connected together. But that this is not the case is evident from the circumstance of death frequently occurring to old people, without such a destruction of the material structure of their bodies as we may fairly suppose to be necessary, to account, upon the principles of Materialism, for death. In many cases immediately after death, at least before the process of putrefaction has broken down the parts, let the body be subjected to accurate dissection, and you will find that the brain, which as you tell us is the seat of the material mind, is apparently sound and perfect. How could this be if your view of the subject were correct<sup>6</sup>? I know, that in cases of diseased brain ending in death, your doctrine *may* account for it, though not even then as I think quite upon the principles which you lay down. But when death happens from causes which leave the brain but slightly affected, and especially from causes which do not very seriously affect some important viscus, which as I have before observed is sometimes the case, particularly in old people, you will, I think, have some difficulty in rationally accounting for this death of the *material mind* as you call it, while the material body is thus connected together.

I have but little doubt that the following remark, in Mr. Lawrence's work, has done much to give currency to this doctrine of the materiality of the human mind; but which, for the reasons I shall give, after inserting the quotation, I believe to be very ill-founded. Mr. Lawrence says, "the

<sup>5</sup> Just as sound or motion is different from the matter moved. You cannot have sound without the motion of matter, nor vitality without the animal organization. It is as near akin as the fiddle and its notes. Crack the fiddle and it dies.

R. C.

<sup>6</sup> An obstruction to the circulation of the fluids in the body may occur without injury to the frame; even whilst it is most perfect. That obstruction in certain cases is death, almost always or often arising from the state of the fluids.

R. C.

same kind of facts, the same reasoning, the same sort of evidence altogether, which shew digestion to be the function of the alimentary canal; motion of the muscles, the various secretions of the respective glands, prove that sensation, perception, memory, judgment, thought, in a word, all the manifestations called mental or intellectual, are the animal functions of their appropriate apparatus, the central organ of the nervous system." Now, Sir, I do not see the analogy here attempted to be set up by Mr. Lawrence. If we open a dead body we are at once convinced, that digestion is the function of the alimentary canal, because we are enabled to trace the food through the various steps of the process of digestion. In like manner, if we examine the different glands, we shall find in the ducts connected with each, a portion of that fluid which is its proper secretion. In the same manner, we discover, by the contraction which takes place in muscles when they are exposed during surgical operations, that motion is the function of the muscles. We can also produce the same effect, by the application of Galvanism, on a subject recently dead. Hence, then, we have the most direct and satisfactory proof, that digestion is the function of the alimentary canal, motion of the muscles, and the various secretions of the respective glands. But how will Mr. Lawrence demonstrate the analogy? Will he shew us a brain in the act of thinking? Or, will he shew us a single thought recently produced by it? Unless he does this, the deduction seemingly wished to be established, fails at once, because the analogy attempted to be proved, no longer holds good. And that he cannot do this, it is not surely necessary for me to attempt to prove.<sup>7</sup>

I will now pass over to what you say, or rather to the quotation you give from Mr. Lawrence, in answer to my observations respecting the want of speech which characterizes the ouran-outang. After giving the quotation from Mr. Lawrence, you triumphantly exclaim "there Sir, that settles the question." Now, Sir, I do not exactly see how this does quite settle the question; for, independent of what might possibly be urged against this conclusion, I will now give you a quotation from Mr. Lawrence's book, which seems to

<sup>7</sup> But it can be proved by shewing that, in the contrary case, the immateriality of the mind is not dependent on the body or nervous system of the body, it would exist when that system was defunct. Does it not, as Mr. Lawrence argues, live and die with the body?



bear somewhat against this inference. Speaking of the faculty of speech, which distinguishes man from other animals, Mr. Lawrence says, "Man exhibits, by external signs what passes within him, he communicates his sentiments by words, and this sign is universal. The savage and the civilized man have the same powers of utterance; both speak naturally, and are equally understood. *It is not owing, as some have imagined, to any defect in their organs, that animals are denied the faculty of speech.* The tongue of a monkey is as perfect as that of a man. Camper asserts, that the laryngeal pouch renders it impossible for the ouran-outang to speak. I do not clearly understand how this is ascertained; but allowing its truth, there are other monkeys *who have not this pouch, and yet cannot speak.* Several animals may be taught to pronounce words and even to repeat sentences, which prove clearly that the want of speech is not owing to any defect in their organs, but to make them conceive the ideas which these words express is beyond the power of art. They articulate and repeat like an echo or machine.

"Language implies a train of thinking; and for this reason, brute animals are incapable of speech; for, though their external senses are not inferior to our own, and though we should allow some of them to possess a faint dawning of comparison, reflection, and judgment, it is certain that they are unable to form that association of ideas in which alone the essence of thought consists<sup>7</sup>."

"There Sir," to use your own expression, what think you of that? You see Mr. Lawrence here tells us that it "is not owing to any defect in their organs that some animals cannot speak."<sup>8</sup> The reason, he says, is, that "language implies a train of thinking, of which brute animals are incapable." He even tells us that "some animals may be taught to speak, but then," says he, "they articulate and repeat like an echo or machine."

To you, Sir, the eulogist and admirer of Mr. Lawrence (of whom I do not wish to be understood as speaking with disrespect, for I am ready to allow, that his work contains many important facts and much useful information) I leave

<sup>7</sup> Such has been the case with millions of human beings; and is to this day.

R. C.

<sup>8</sup> The difference in the organization makes all the difference in animals. Wherever the same organizations exist, the same results follow. As to capacity, accidents may be required to bring them into action.

R. C.

the task of reconciling or explaining away, as far as you are able, the apparent contradictions here implied.<sup>9</sup> Wishing you to bear in mind, that as you regarded your quotation from Mr. Lawrence, as being quite conclusive against me, so I am *on the same ground*, justified in regarding my quotation as equally conclusive against yourself.

I will now, though perhaps not in the strict line of argument, bring you back to what you say on the neutrality of the human mind. I need not demonstrate to you that almost every species of matter is in a state of continual progressive change. This general law applies with peculiar force to the material elements of the human body; every part of which is in a state of constant change. Let us apply this fact to your doctrine, and see how it will stand the test. Memory is a constituent part of the mind. Now, if memory be nothing more than an impression made on the brain, *which is material*, by what means is it retained, seeing that the brain, like every other portion of the healthy body, is always throwing off the old particles and receiving depositions of new matter in their stead. That recollection is retained, notwithstanding this continual change going on in the brain, will not be disputed. The fact might be proved a thousand ways. For instance, what is more common than to hear old persons relate with the greatest minuteness the most trifling events of their childhood? This being, you will remember, very long after that portion of brain which first received the impression, has been thrown off, and its place supplied by new depositions of matter. How, upon the principle of materialism, do you account for this? I should much wish you to give an answer to this question.<sup>10</sup>

With respect to the system taught by Drs. Gall and Spurzheim, which you so much admire,<sup>11</sup> it would, at present, take up quite too much time to analyze it in all its parts.

<sup>9</sup> I see no real contradiction in the matter. Camper attributes the want of speech in the ourang-outang to the laryngeal pouch. Mr. Lawrence to a want of capacity to associate ideas. This by no means removes the dissimilarity of organization. Both rest upon the same grounds; though they differ as to the peculiar organ.

R. C.

<sup>10</sup> You shall have it as in a former case, by the contrary question. Does memory extend beyond the body? Is it independent of the body? My ignorance of particular phenomena can be no proof of your proposition.

R. C.

<sup>11</sup> Really I do not admire it; for I started objections the first



Nor does it strike me as being, just now, very necessary. I shall, therefore, only observe, that their claim to originality, if they do make it, as far, at least, as their mode of anatomical demonstration goes, does not appear to be very well founded. There are three modes of dissecting the human brain. The particular details of which, as, perhaps, they might neither be very intelligible nor very interesting to a great portion of your readers, I shall not give, but shall content myself with observing, that, as far as my knowledge goes, it is evident, that the mode practised by Drs. Gall and Spurzheim, was discovered long ago, and, in a great measure, practised by Varolius first, and afterwards by Vicussens, whose work, I believe, has remained in a state of discredit and obscurity which it did not merit. In giving this statement, I wish to be understood, as not being at all actuated by any invidious feeling towards Drs. Gall and Spurzheim, but merely by a wish to render an act of justice to the dead.

I will now make a few brief remarks on what you said a short time ago, in a letter addressed to the Lord Chancellor, Eldon. You there tell him, that in two years' time, you will make him acknowledge your superiority. I mean it not offensively, when I say, that I regard you as being quite an enthusiast in the propagation of your favourite opinions. It is in the nature of enthusiasm to be much too sanguine, so I take it to be with you. Hence it is, that I regard this saying of yours to the Lord Chancellor, as having no foundation in truth.<sup>12</sup> At the expiration of the two years which you mention, you will, I believe, if you both live, be in about the same relative situation to each other that you now are; that is to say, Lord Eldon will still be the Chancellor, and you, in all probability, still a prisoner.

With respect to the progress of your opinions on which you appear to calculate for producing some decided effect in your favour, I believe you are quite mistaken. It would, perhaps, be difficult to refer to a period in the history of the world, when greater exertions were being made for the propagation of religious opinions, than are being made at present. And, if the reports of Bible Associations, Missionary Societies, Annual Conferences &c. are at all to be depended upon, there has scarcely ever been a period when these ex-

time I noticed it. I have the organ of veneration of religion, very large! I think the system curious, and worthy of further research.

R. C.

<sup>12</sup> It is a question as to probability.

R. C.

ertions have been more successfully employed. Taking this into consideration, and knowing the natural repugnance that men in general have to the opinions which you hold, I cannot but look upon you as being quite too sanguine in the calculation you appear to have made.<sup>13</sup>

Wishing you to take this into consideration, and again assuring you, that however erroneous I may regard your doctrine as being, I do not think it founded either in humanity or sound policy, to oppose you with any other weapon than reason and fair argument.

I am, Sir,

Yours respectfully,

W. FITTON.

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TO MR. WILLIAM FITTON, ROYTON,  
LANCASHIRE.

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Dorchester Gaol, August 22, 1824,  
commencement of the Godless Era.

SIR,

To part with your doll, or idol, seems to be felt by you as a punishment. A god you must have as a play thing, because you see the multitude of full grown children amuse themselves with it. You would persuade us, that you have not yet mind enough to dispense with the toy, nor discernment enough to see that it affords but a sorry pastime. As a friend I will make another effort to divest your mind of this childish, this futile propensity, this bad habit; and you, at least, will have the satisfaction to reflect, that you have not been whipped out of it. The Protestant Christian children have been taught to throw away their crucifixes, and it now behoves the Materialists to make a clean sweep of the remaining rubbish; that human beings may freely grow to

<sup>13</sup> I cannot be too sanguine, when I see that no man can advance a single argument to prove the existence of the being which is called God. As far as mankind see this, they are Atheists from necessity, from the absence of the existence of a God, in which to believe. The only difficulty on my side is, to elevate them so far above other animals as to excite thought in them upon this subject. This is going on rapidly, and this makes me in whatever degree it exists, if it were confined to myself, the superior of the Lord Chancellor until he also begins to think and to be of the same mind.

R. C.



mental manhood, and learn the right meaning of rationality.

To explain many little points in my last and your present letter, of which you complain, I have to inform you, that between writing the first and second, it was stated to me in writing, that a suspicion existed in your neighbourhood of a disposition in you to take up the trade of preaching Christianity for profit, and that this disposition, and this alone, made you sore at what I was doing. I offer this as an apology for some of the hints in my last which gave offence, without offering an opinion on the truth or falsehood of the imputation. It might possibly have been conjecture, as idle as the conjecture of human animals about a God. As the main question, that will settle all others, between you and me, is, that of *God or no God*, I shall narrow the discussion to that point.

I stated in my last, that you did not search after truth upon this subject; but contented yourself with following the strongest current of opinion. You complain of this imputation, and, in the midst of your complaint, give me the fullest proof, that the assertion was correct. You again acknowledge, that you have no proof of a God, but in the universal opinion of mankind upon that head: and urge this universal opinion as a reason why I should yield to it. What is this, but following the strongest current of opinion without examining the truth or falsehood of the thing for yourself? Why, Sir, I will go so far as to say, that, if every human being, past and present, had been of your opinion about a God, upon the same grounds of forming that opinion as you have, I, upon those grounds which I have for opposing that opinion, would maintain the atheistical side of the question against you all.

Do you allow the universal opinion of the Roman Catholic Christians to be a proof that their sacramental bread and wine is the real body and blood of Jesus Christ? Does such an absurd notion, though universal in that sect, satisfy you? Can universality of opinion be held up as a proof of any thing not demonstrable? If so, the earth would have been flat and motionless, in spite of its now known rotundity and rapid various motions. The same kind of ignorance, which led all mankind to talk about the earth being flat, motionless, and alike the centre and circumference of the universe, gave rise to the notion about a God. Better knowledge of the things about us compels us to scout both of those once universal notions. Whatever my will be, I cannot believe in the

existence of a God, such as you contend for: and why? because I see nothing of the kind; and because, I see no need of any thing of the kind, to account for the existence about me. On this latter head, if I am ignorant of the real source of production, of any of those identities about me, am I justified in fabling a cause; or if I fable a cause, ought you and all your fellows to take it as truth for want of better knowledge? Confess your ignorance about God, and be no longer so silly as to amuse yourself with such idle dreams. Speak the truth, that which every man must know to be truth, say that you know nothing about God. If I cannot induce you, by mild reasoning, to throw away this mental play thing, I must ridicule, I must shame you out of it. I must shew you, that the men of this age do not play with such things.

I am not alone in this opinion of your God; I find myself supported and cheered on by some of the most enlightened men that this or any other country ever produced; and I further find, that the majority of educated men are Atheists: only, unfortunately, some of them are kept in silence by family connections, others from private interests, and others are dishonest enough to desire the preservation of superstition among the multitude as the best means of enslaving them. But if I stood alone, my arguments would be equally valid; and I never feel the desire to add weight to them by the use of a single name. My references are not to men, but to things. The opinions of mankind settle nothing, change the properties of nothing. Whatever they say or think has less power with the things about us, than the most gentle gust of wind that moves in the atmosphere of our planet. In all ages, in all countries, mankind have been silly, mad beings, pursuing any thing but their own improvement and happiness. Their speech, their reason, their "immortal souls" constitute a mere vapour, visible for a moment, dispersed the next; a sound that dies in its very birth, that has one motion as an identity and passes.

Universal opinion, of itself, proves nothing: the question in all such matters is—what do we know? Now, do you know any thing about what you call God?—I do not. I put this question to a clergyman the other day, whose answer was: "though I do not know, still I may believe."—No, you can only believe that which you do know upon such a matter. A traveller may narrate what he has seen, and you have not seen, and you may give him credence to a certain degree, or altogether, upon the relative probability of his



tale to your knowledge of what you see about you; or from your finding different travellers narrating the same thing; but if one or twenty travellers came and told you, that they had heard an ass converse in human language with a man, would you believe it? No; because, from your knowledge of asses, you would have no probability whereon to rest. Besides, all the men who have preached God or Gods have been utterly ignorant of those things which we now know as to the properties of matter and motion, and as to the planetary system of the universe. They were not travellers to come and tell us what they had seen, they invented, they fabled things, which no man had ever confessed to have seen, other than as a vision, or dream. And these inventions, these fables, we very naturally every where find to be full of contradictions and the most gross absurdities. I have just been reading a book called "An abridgment of the Vedant, or the resolution of all the Veds, translated from the Sanscrit, by Rammohun Roy, and printed at Calcutta:" this professes to define God, or to give the opinions of the most remote inhabitants of Hindostan upon the subject; but I find it full of those contradictions and absurdities which every other piece of writing about a God of necessity contains. This Rammohun Roy is respresented to be a learned Brahmin converted to Unitarian Christianity. He might as well have remained a Brahmin, for what good he has done to himself or to any other person. It is not to books that we ought to look, to find a God: the place to look is, in what has been called the "book of nature;" into the existences we see about us. You Deists, Christians, or whatever you may be, have but substituted paper and ink idols for those of wood, stone, and metal. Does your God dwell upon the earth? No, you will say. Does he dwell in the moon? You will say, that you suppose not. Does he dwell in the Sun, or any other fixed star or stars? You will say, that you have no conception of his dwelling any where in particular; but that you suppose him to pervade all space alike. If so, then your God is mere senseless, sensationless, matter and motion. You know nothing of sensation, sense, or intelligence, but in relation with some animated, identical being. Such a being can neither fabricate a fly, nor obstruct the motion of a wave of the sea: can neither lengthen day or night, nor change a season: such a being is a mere helpless form, that must yield to other forms and notions, and be extinguished with as little ceremony and consequence as an exhausted farthing candle; or crushed out of life, as we

crush insects by almost every footstep. Such a God is the puppet of the mind of man. What has been called human reason hitherto, has been almost every where phantasmal. We have degraded our natures, and have left right reason to be held and enjoyed by those animals which we call brutes and affect to despise. They have more just grounds to despise us, if they or any other being could take an impartial view of our mutual conduct and character.

Argument upon this question of a God there can be none. On my side, there is nothing to be done but to expose the absurdities you advance upon the matter, by comparing them with the things known to exist.

The bad passions of mankind are only to be restrained by moral and civil culture—and the very existence of those passions is negative proof against the existence of that God which you fancy to be necessary to restrain them. Did you ever ask yourself—why your God created those passions to be restrained? why goodness should create evil? why omnipotence should be a mere cobbler always patching its own work? Ask yourself and reason upon those questions seriously, and you will soon find your God to be a mental phantasm. Without such a God, upon the known properties of matter and principles of motion, every thing is to be rationally accounted for; whether to us it be relatively good or bad.

If you have any thing further to say in defence of your idol by another year, I shall be glad to see, to print, and to answer it; but I hope you will grow wiser. I respect you as a useful man in your neighbourhood; and though I have not a doubt, but you have felt chagrined to see some of your neighbours espouse my side of the question—NO GOD—NO PRIESTS—NO RELIGION, I cannot doubt but that you will follow them, if you fairly enquire, find it convenient, and feel such a love of truth as to follow it in any place and upon every condition.

Did such a being exist as you call God, it would not remain a matter of doubt to any man. It must of necessity be visible to all. The mind of man can now trace the regions of space and examine the properties of matter, and he is compelled, when honest, to say, that he can neither find a God nor a spirit intelligent like himself.

With every compliment yours,  
RICHARD CARLILE.

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN A DOCTOR OF  
MEDICINE AND A UNITARIAN PREACHER,  
BOTH OF DUNDEE, IN CONSEQUENCE OF  
A LOAN, FROM THE FORMER TO THE LAT-  
TER, OF A COPY OF NUMBER 1, VOL. IX.  
OF "THE REPUBLICAN."

(Continued from page 250.)

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PRIEST TO THE DOCTOR.

WELL DOCTOR, February 18, 1824.  
I HAVE digested your last dose; but it has not cured me yet  
of what you consider my fanaticism. You have prepared  
it no doubt *secundum artem*; but still there is not enough  
of *Essentia Logica* to do the business.

You charge Christianity with "incongruities—with ob-  
scure dogmas, revolting to common sense; and you think,  
that there is little wonder, that men, escaped from the bond-  
age of early prejudices, throw such doctrines into the back  
ground as altogether unworthy of their attention." But  
men, in their escape from early prejudices, may run into  
other prejudices, and be prejudiced against what they con-  
sider prejudice. It is not an easy matter to hold the mind  
in a fair equipoise of impartiality, between bigotry on the one  
hand and indifference on the other; and they who think that  
they have escaped from prejudice, may therefore still be un-  
der its fetters; and though they may have changed one pre-  
judice for another, they may not, however, have changed  
prejudice for impartiality. Take care then, Doctor, take  
care.

If you take your views of Christianity from certain creeds,  
and not from the discourses of its founder, and its apostles,  
you may no doubt find doctrines revolting to common  
sense. But, in the view of Christianity which I entertain, I  
see nothing that is not rational. My wonder may be ex-  
cited, but my reason is not confounded. What is wonder-  
ful, is not however for that reason, irrational. A thing may  
be right wonderful, may be inexplicable, and yet be true.

But you say, that "whilst Christianity is connected with  
objects that are entirely inaccessible to our senses, and of  
course incapable of demonstration, you shall always be con-



vinced, that it has no more claim to credit than the pretensions of a thousand other religions," &c. Indeed! If demonstration is to be our criterion of what is truth, our circle of truths will be exceedingly narrow indeed. History must be all blotted out—ten thousand times ten thousand things which we call facts, and are accustomed to act upon as facts, must be all pronounced delusions<sup>1</sup>.

The demonstration which you want is not necessary for belief. Indeed there would be no thanks to a man for believing that for which he had such demonstration—that belief could cost him no exertion of intellect, and the conduct resulting from it could have no merit—he could have no alternative, and therefore I say no thanks to him.

I had denied in my last letter, that Mahomet ever made any pretensions to miracles. I have not the Alcoran beside me, and therefore I may have been mistaken. But what you say in reply does not altogether correct me, if I be mistaken. You seem to produce only what his followers say of him<sup>2</sup>: but it was not to what his followers believe of him that I referred, but to the pretensions which he himself made. Now I am not sure, that he himself pretended to perform miracles before the eyes of spectators. To dreams and to visions, of which nobody could be a judge, he may have pretended, but I am afraid you will find it difficult to prove that he made any pretensions to work miracles before the eyes of the multitude. This, however, is a question of no moment: it does not signify to what Mahomet did or did not pretend. The grand question is, whether the evidence of his pretensions is equal to that of the claims of Jesus. Men may pretend any thing, but it is not about what they pretend that we are to care so much, as it is what they prove. Now, I think the evidence of the claims of Jesus altogether different from that of the pretensions of any impostor. His miracles were day-light miracles—they were not done in the dark, nor were they done in a corner. Above all, they were done to establish pretensions not agreeable, but opposed, to the prejudices of those before whom they were performed. This is an important consid-

<sup>1</sup> Demonstration does not require that we see every thing acted over again; but that narrations of circumstances be such as we now see to be practicable. And we now see nothing of supernatural agency. R. C.

<sup>2</sup> That is the only foundation on which the miracles of Jesus Christ rests. R. C.

ration. If it had been the case that Jesus had no enemies in Judea interested in scrutinizing his pretension and in exposing the imposture if they could find any, the evidence of his miracles would have lost much of its weight. But seeing that they were done in an enemy's country—seeing that the claims of Jesus were obnoxious to the prejudices of the multitude, and most hostile to the interests of the learned, the miracles of Jesus are altogether different in evidence from that of any “lying wonders” pretended to, not before prejudice, but before a credulous partiality, and protected by the powers, not opposed by them. Nothing but the consciousness of truth could in these circumstances animate Jesus—nothing but the force of truth could in these circumstances make him triumph

With respect to the dark ages, I only hazarded a conjecture; but I do not yet see sufficient reason to dismiss it. I still doubt not that there were many, even during these, on whom Christian truth exerted its influence: but this does not signify: whatever influence it had during these, it certainly had a marvellous influence in previous ages, and it still exerts a mighty influence, and will still exert it. We do not know how long the world is to last—we do not know but that Christianity, in its genuine simplicity and purity, will make the earth a paradise for a much longer period than that which has elapsed since the mission of Jesus.

You blame the religion of Jesus with the crimes of its professors, and there is a bit of contradiction in what you say on that topic. You say, “if ever it exalted any to the state of angels and brought forward a few who were willing to make sacrifices; on the other hand it has sent millions into the gulph of perdition.” If it has been so direful in its effects, it must be too much to grant even an *if* to the assertion, that it has had opposite effects. Christ says, in one of his discourses, “Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?”

It is an error to charge Christianity with the crimes of Christians<sup>3</sup>; Christianity frowns upon these crimes and denounces them. It is not the belief of Christianity that has been the cause of the crimes; but the belief of something else. There is an Anti-Christianity which calls itself Christianity—a system expressly predicted in the scripture, see 2 Thessalonians chap. ii. 1 Timothy chap. iv.

You still contend, that if Christianity be divine it should have been universal. But still, I think, that if there be po-

<sup>3</sup> But if Christianity does not regulate the actions of Christians; for what is it good?

R. C.

sitive evidence in proof of the divine mission of Jesus, the consideration that Christianity is not universal, will not disprove that fact. It does not disprove the fact of the wisdom or goodness of the Deity—the consideration that all the creatures of the universe are not alike in faculties, in circumstances or in privileges. If there be wise laws for this, may there not be wise laws for the other case. I should like to see wise reasons for the superiority of one or a few nations to the rest which will not justify Providence with respect to the mission of Christ<sup>4</sup>.

Christianity was marching fast to universality, when some of its professors, who were only professors, did by their own wickedness involve the world in a great measure in darkness<sup>5</sup>. What was to be done in this case? Was Christ to descend from heaven and again die for mankind? This would have been too much to expect. Was God to hurl his thunderbolts on the heads of its corrupters? The same fate might as well be the portion of every tyrant, and the same wisdom which permits a Ferdinand to involve unhappy Spain again in darkness, saw it good to leave unpunished the spoilers of the simplicity of Christianity<sup>6</sup>.

Before I finish, I will tell you what you must do before you overthrow Christianity. You must prove that Jesus and his apostles were impostors<sup>7</sup>, though, on the supposition of imposture, they could have had no hopes of success, and had every possible motive to deter them from their enterprise. Or you will have to prove them enthusiasts, though crowds, in spite of early prejudices, and in spite of persecution, adhered to them as the oracles of God; and though the body of Jesus was never produced by the Jews from its grave to confound the statements of the apostles respecting it. This is what you will have to do, Doctor. On the determination of these questions, Christianity stands or falls. Let us determine these then first, and settle other matters afterwards.—And in the mean time accept this as a token of the regards of

Yours, &c.

<sup>4</sup> The variance as to the characters of nations is the best of all proofs that there is no Providence in the matter. There you have the *wisest reason*. R. C.

<sup>5</sup> This Priest knows very little about the history of Christianity. R. C.

<sup>6</sup> Excellent argument to prove an all-wise Providence!

R. C.

<sup>7</sup> Enough, to prove that Jesus is a fictitious character.

R. C.



## DOCTOR TO THE PRIEST.

SIR,

February 25, 1824.

THE dose which you acknowledge to have received, I observe, has not cured you of your fanaticism; it has, however, I am inclined to think, convinced you, that, upon the principles of nature, reason, and common sense, christianity cannot be defended. You have certainly steered clear of the ground upon which any rational explanation can take place, and the total silence upon those principles, to which, in a particular manner, I directed you, sufficiently indicates, that the arguments which I have offered, have had a tolerable good effect; without coming to such views, I was well aware, that the correspondence might be carried on *ad infinitum*, as I knew that no decision could possibly be obtained, if I had confined myself to the general history that Christianity presents. Each sect and each individual have their own particular ideas, and, as every one wrangles or contends that his is the best, a rational being can only establish the verity of his opinions, regarding religion, upon the great standard of nature herself. Her volume lies open to all, and is seldom read with that perversity of intellect which always accompanies the prejudices of theological sectarians, "who continually have recourse to their Bible, each most absurdly assuming the dangerous and wicked principle," that

Hic liber est in quo quærit sua dogmata quisque,  
Atque in quo reperit dogmata quisque sua.\*

In looking over your epistle, I find you rest principally upon calling upon me to prove that Jesus and his apostles were impostors. My former observations, I think, pretty strongly confirm this. Overlooking, at present, the many strange stories, which appear to me in no other light than the most superstitious legends, I merely advert to what is called Christ's ascension into heaven, an event, which, to have gained credit, ought to have been fully and accurately related by men who were witnesses of it. To have ascended publicly, would at least have convinced his adversaries, and would have given to mankind an incontestible proof of his divinity; but, in place of this, all is doubt and obscurity. Matthew never alludes to such an event. John does not say that it even happened; and, as they were both the disciples of Christ when this grand event took place, it is certainly strange why they have omitted it. Mark and Luke, who were not present at the ascension, (if such an improbable thing ever occurred) are the only writers who pretend to give an account of it. Mark relates it in the most abrupt manner imaginable. Luke's narrative is equally vague; the one asserting, that Jesus ascended at Jerusalem, the

\* Here is a book in which every one seeks his own dogmas,  
And in which every one finds them.

other holding out, that it was at Bethany, a place many miles distant. Even with these contradictions, it is a second-hand story, and no credit can be given to it. Indeed, independent of such inconsistencies in a work said to be inspired, it devolves upon you to explain in what manner Jesus lost the gravity of his body so as to escape from the earth. With regard to the narrative of his resurrection, the evangelists have detailed likewise many absurd and extravagant stories; but they do not venture to assert, that any individual saw Jesus rising from the tomb. We have not the testimony of a single individual upon this singular event, and why a matter of such importance was accomplished in so obscure a manner and not before as many witnesses as were present at his death, is sufficient to prove that these strange things are related by men, who, in place of being inspired with wisdom, seem to be remarkable only for ignorance and superstition. It is said that Jesus was in the grave three days and three nights, but this is not the case. He was, according to his disciples, taken from the cross upon a Friday afternoon, and his resurrection took place on Sunday morning, one asserting that it was dark, another that it was sunrise, evidently shewing that these *inspired* writings are full of contradiction, and that the whole is an imposition.

If you can reconcile these things that are so incongruous, even from the very womb of inspiration, you will do more than all the theologians that have gone before you. The resurrection and ascension are the two principle props of the Christian religion; and, if they cannot be proved, the system must fall to the ground. It is quite inconsistent with the character of a God to do any thing that is connected with contradiction, at least, to allow events to be detailed of so much consequence to the benefit of mankind, pregnant with such gross absurdities. You allow that you may have been misinformed with regard to the miracles of Mahomet, but you are not willing to allow them upon the same ground as those of Jesus; are they not recorded in the Alcoran as having been performed at certain times and places? The Alcoran of the Christians gives no better proof; and, to see that they stand upon equal foundation, I recommend for your perusal, the *inspired* productions of Mahomet.

You seem to misunderstand me in your allusion regarding my remarks upon the state of angels. The word "*if*," which you seize hold of, implies no more than that neither you nor I have any knowledge about such beings. If you, however, possess, upon this point, any superior knowledge, I should be pleased were you to give me proof of their existence. In the view of christianity, which you entertain, you say you see nothing but what is rational, but I contend, while you

believe in dogmas which are not in unison with the general laws of the universe, that you abandon, at once, all that is connected with reason, and enter upon a field of error and confusion.

In the works of nature, we find every thing that is wonderful. To behold the radiance of countless worlds rolling in the immensity of space, excites ideas that are almost too great for our imagination. Your wonder, therefore, in many things around us, may be daily excited; but, when we find people wondering at the relation of events which are beyond the boundaries of possibility to happen, I have no hesitation in saying, that their imaginations delight to dwell in the marvellous regions of fiction. If you prefer *faith*, in matters of this kind, I must inform you, that faith begins where knowledge ends; indeed, it is an article of so much convenience, that, were I to indulge in it, I should feel afraid it would make me believe that two and two did not make four, or what is, perhaps, as wonderful, that the glorious luminary, the sun, underwent a revolution, and that all nature stood still to please the fancy and gratify the pride of a few marauding barbarians.

Your remarks, about the merit of believing, I do not well comprehend—demonstration needs no belief—when a thing is demonstrated it is made known to our senses, and, therefore, we know it to be true—belief, in this case, is out of the question—you affect surprise upon this subject, but every one knows, that, since the days of Bacon, in philosophy, every thing is admitted, for which there is sufficient evidence, and every thing rejected, for which there is not a principle which has been the great means of advancing science to its present enlightened state. In general history, every thing is admitted which is natural.

Plutarch tells us that Brutus was defeated at Phillipi, but no one believes the historian when he relates the circumstance of the gigantic spectre, that appeared on the eve of battle to this renowned Roman. The violation of the story by Cassius was rational, who ascribed it to the effects of a diseased imagination. In the history of our own country, we know that Duncan was murdered by the ambitious Macbeth; but we smile at the tale so gravely related about the witches. To separate from history all that is connected with the marvellous, requires, now-a-days, little discrimination, and I really feel surprised when I see men, otherwise distinguished for their learning, embracing tales the most delusive, and which I am convinced, have no more to recommend them, in point of true natural fact, than the fanciful and flowery fiction of the Arabian Nights' entertainments.

I remain, Sir, Yours truly, &c.



## PRIEST TO THE DOCTOR.

So Doctor,

March 2, 1824.

You are beginning to cry "*To triumphe.*" Do not be in such a hurry, Doctor. Take a little time, there is time enough for that yet.

You complain first of my inattention to those principles to which you say that you in a particular manner directed me. Now I shall look over our first letter and see what principles I have neglected. You there object to Christianity, that it is not universal. This objection I have answered. You secondly object that Christianity produced no revolution that tended to improve the condition of mankind. To this also I have replied. You next refer to certain events recorded in scripture which you think unworthy of credit; such as the miracle of the sun standing still, &c. These, indeed, I have not scrutinized—not however, because I thought that they affected the truth of the Christian religion. It was my opinion, formed from the little experience which I have had in controversy, that a discussion cannot be limited to too narrow a compass. At the close of my last letter, therefore, I set before you for this purpose, what I considered it necessary for you to do before you could overthrow Christianity. To do you justice, you have in your last letter attempted to do something to the point, by endeavouring to invalidate the testimony of the Apostles concerning the ascension and the resurrection of Jesus. Now, I say, that this is attempting at least to do something to the point. What has the miracle of the sun standing still, or that of the downfall of the walls of Jericho, or even the history of the expulsion of the Canaanites; what have these to do with the grand question, whether Jesus and his apostles were imposters. Suppose now, that you could prove, that the sun never stood still—that the walls of Jericho never fell down that the Canaanites were never expelled by divine command, you would no doubt prove, that the historian who narrates these events was misinformed with respect to these particular events; but you would not prove, that the doctrines of Jesus formed no revelation from heaven. I do not however deny the events referred to. I must have something more than mere assertion, Doctor, to convince me of their fabulousness<sup>1</sup>. With respect to the first—namely, the miracle of the sun standing still, there might for any thing we can tell have been other purposes to serve by the miracle in the economy of nature, besides that of assisting Joshua. Though the event took place on the

<sup>1</sup> And, I presume, the Doctor wants something more than mere assertion to prove their truth.

exclamation of Joshua, still it might have been designed for important purposes, in conjunction with the one mentioned. Surely you will not laugh at me for pleading our ignorance of the mighty mechanism of nature. Did you know all that is necessary for the regulation of the vast machine, you might; but I hope that it is saying nothing derogatory to say, that you do not.

With respect to the second, namely, the downfall of the walls of Jericho, I presume, that it is the sound of the rams' horns ringing in your ears, that sets you a laughing. But in the original, there is no word corresponding to the expression "rams' horns." It should have been translated trumpets of the Jubilee. I am willing to prove this to your satisfaction at any time.

With respect to the expulsion of the Canaanites, I would observe, 1st. that it cannot be denied that God has a right to punish<sup>2</sup>. If he has not the right of punishing, his law is without authority<sup>3</sup>. His moral government is without stability. And if it be allowed that God has the right of punishing nations and individuals, who can presume to dictate to him the quantity of it? If his providence<sup>4</sup> commission the earthquake to swallow, the volcano to bury, the pestilence to ravage, the inundation to overwhelm men, women, and children, who can impeach his wisdom. But it may be the kind of calamity inflicted on a people that is the ground of objection. Had God involved the Canaanites in earthquake, or overwhelmed them in an inundation, it may be said there would be no complaint; but it is the circumstance of his employing their fellow creatures, for their destruction, to which objection is principally made; to which it may be replied, that there are cases in which killing is considered no murder. Nobody thinks of calling the executioner a murderer, who hangs a murderer. A law may be suspended by the divine law-giver, in extreme cases, in which the suspension of it is necessary. Though God gave the law, "Thou shalt not kill," yet this law was to be suspended in the case of the execution of a murderer. The executioner who put the murderer to death was not considered a transgressor of the law, "thou shalt not kill." Now, the same authority which could suspend this law in the execution of a murderer might suspend it in the case of the execution of the wicked Canaanites<sup>5</sup>. If the Jews in destroying the Canaanites were the divine execu-

<sup>2</sup> Better had he set things agoing so far right, as to need no punishment.

R. C.

<sup>3</sup> This is speaking of a mere human being. The foundation of all Theism.

R. C.

<sup>4</sup> Admirable providence again!

R. C.

<sup>5</sup> In what were they wicked?

R. C.

tioners, inflicting, by his authority, his judgments on them for their tremendous iniquities and abomination, and thus exhibiting to themselves, to all nations and to all generations, an example of God's abhorrence of these iniquities and abominations; if they were his commissioned executioners in this respect, then were they just as innocent of murder as the executioner of the state in inflicting death on the criminal.

After giving your thrust at the Old Testament, you proceed to pass one at the New, and the subject of Demoniacs does not escape your notice. Now, you ought to know, that many believers in Christianity consider the Demoniacs of the New Testament as nothing more than madmen, or epileptics, and think that as it was the custom of the age, to ascribe the diseases of the lunatics, or the epileptics, to demoniacal possession. Jesus, in speaking of these unfortunate beings, uses the popular language concerning them. Farmer who writes so ably on miracles, also writes very learnedly in defence of this hypothesis. Priestly defends another hypothesis, if I mistake not, namely, that the causes of the diseases of those persons did not form a part of the revelation of Jesus, any more than the Newtonian system of astronomy. Now, surely, it will be too much to expect of me the investigation of this subject. Yet, I may remark, that though you should prove the hypothesis of the two theologians, whom I have mentioned, both wrong, yet you would find it a hard matter, I think, to prove the impossibility of the existence of the imaginary beings of which you speak. Impossibility is a big word, and I would find it too big for my utterance on such a question.

You next ridicule Christ's temptation on the mountain. Here again, I would bid you be cautious, lest you "do err not knowing the scriptures." Many Theologians do not understand this transaction in its literal sense; but consider it merely as a scenical representation, exhibited to the mind of Jesus, for the purpose of preparing him for those temptations to abuse his ministry, to the purposes of ambition which he was to encounter in the course of his ministry.

On the subject of the miraculous conception, you write with a warmth bordering on the enthusiastic temperature. This is another question on which even Christians are divided. Many Christians deny it. For my part, I see nothing irrational in the doctrine of the miraculous conception. Is the creation of a body in a different manner from the ordinary course of generation incredible? This is all that is implied in the doctrine of the miraculous conception, and surely there is nothing absurd in that.

You next bring as an objection against the account we have of the darkness which took place at the crucifixion,



the circumstance that it is not mentioned by the Roman historians. Now, 1st. I observe, that the word *earth* is a mistranslation—that *land* is the proper translation of the original word—namely, the land of Judea. The word is so translated in Matt. chap. xxvi. ver. 45. 2d. the darkness does not seem to have been very intense. Jesus notwithstanding the darkness, could from the cross discern his mother and the apostle John. It might have been only a sort of mist<sup>6</sup>. 3d. You could not expect any Roman historian to mention it, unless you could shew that he would have thought it worth while to mention it, or that it would have come in his way to mention it, or that his prejudices against Christianity would have allowed him to mention it.

I now return to your last epistle. You begin it with the subject of Christ's ascension to heaven. You say that Matthew never alludes to such an event. But there might be other causes for the omission than a doubt of the fact. The fact he could not doubt, if he believed in the resurrection of Jesus; for where could he suppose Jesus to be, if not in heaven.

You also say, that John never says any thing of the event in question. But John records discourses of our Lord, that allude to his removal from the world; which he would not have done, if he had not believed it. See John, chap. xiii. ver. 3, chap. xiv. ver. 1, 2, 3. In chap. xx. ver. 17, we are informed, that Jesus said to Mary after his resurrection, "Touch me not for I am not yet ascended to my father, but go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend unto my father and your father, and to my God and your God." John chap. vii. ver. 39, may also be considered an allusion to the event. You say, that Mark and Luke are the only writers who pretend to give an account of the event. Does not Paul refer to it? See Ephesians chap. iv. ver. 10, chap. i. ver. 20. Does not Peter refer to it? See Acts chap. iii. ver. 21, chap. ii. ver. 33, chap. v. ver. 31. Does not Stephen acknowledge the ascension of Jesus? See Acts chap. vii. ver. 56<sup>7</sup>.

You say, that Mark represents the event as having taken place at Jerusalem; and that Luke again represents it as having taken place at Bethany. Where does Mark say that Jesus ascended at Jerusalem. I, in vain, look for the passage. Besides, where did you learn that Bethany was many miles distant from Jerusalem. You say nothing to prove that Bethany was not "nigh unto Jerusalem about fifteen furlongs off."

<sup>6</sup> It must have been a Scotch mist!

R. C.

<sup>7</sup> Yes, but the Doctor spoke of the Gospel Writers, and not of the Christian world generally.

R. C.

But you think, that it devolves upon me to explain in "what manner Jesus lost the gravity of his body, so as to escape from the earth." Indeed! as well might one who had never before heard of the ascension of that large massy body that goes under the name of a balloon, tell the narrator of such an occurrence, that it devolved on him to show how such a large body, with a man besides attached to it, could lose its gravity. Such a demand might be as gravely made as yours. I hope you will keep *your* gravity, Doctor, when I talk about the balloon, and that you will remember that there is no argument in a laugh. Whatever you may think of the analogy, I think you can hardly deny that the Great Power that upholds universal nature was abundantly competent to bear Jesus from the earth<sup>a</sup>.

From the subject of the ascension of Jesus, you proceed to that of his resurrection. You first object, that no one is said to have seen Jesus in the act of rising from the tomb. What of that? (though at the same time I must say, that the guards must have seen him.) But what though no one saw the act of resurrection, it was surely quite sufficient for all the purposes of proof, with respect to his resurrection, that he was seen by a sufficient number of competent and honest witnesses for a sufficient length of time after he had risen from the dead. It is not to the purpose at all, to ask whether they saw him rise from the dead—the question is, whether they saw him after he had risen from the dead.

You next seek to invalidate the truth of their testimony with respect to the resurrection of the dead, by referring to the declaration of Jesus, that he was to be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Now is it not more likely, that this was a peculiarity of language intelligible enough to the people to whom it was addressed, than that it was an inconsistency. For, if it be an inconsistency, how could it escape the wary eye of an impostor. Would it not have been so glaring a one, that an impostor, anxious as he would be to avoid inconsistencies, would, in a moment, detect and reject; and, if, therefore, we found it in his writings, would not the very circumstance of its occurrence in his writings be a presumptive evidence that it was no inconsistency.

Secondly, that the expression we are considering was a peculiarity intelligible to the Jews, is farther evident from the occurrence of the same expression in Esther chap. iv. ver. 16, where Esther declares, that she will fast with her people three days, night and day, yet we find her, chap. v.

<sup>a</sup> Well then, we must infer, that the skin of Jesus was so distended with gas as to ascend as a matter of necessity! But, Priest, where is heaven, where did he stop when he began to ascend?

R. C.

ver. 1—4, on the third day at a banquet with the King. That expression so common in Scotland “this day eight days” is quite unintelligible to an Englishman accustomed to the expression “this day se’night.” If he do allow it any meaning at all, he considers that it denotes a day more than a week; though we use the expression to denote only a week.

But, thirdly, though you did prove the expression, we have been considering, to be an inconsistency, still I would say, that you did nothing to affect the grand question, were Jesus and his Apostles honest in their testimony, and were the doctrines which they taught a revelation from heaven? If you proved the expression an inconsistency, you would no doubt prove that an evangelist, or a transcriber of the evangelist, made a slight mistake relative to a matter of no importance—a small mistake with respect to an expression used by Jesus—but you would not, I repeat it, at all affect the grand question.

You next notice what you consider another inconsistency; namely, the assertion of one evangelist, that the women came to the sepulchre at the rising of the sun, and the assertion of another, that Mary came to the sepulchre when it was yet dark. Now the former is speaking of the time when the women arrived at the sepulchre—the latter speaks of the time when Mary left her house and went away to the sepulchre; it was then dark, but when she had arrived at the sepulchre the sun was rising. John says, “The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early when it was yet dark.” He says, “cometh,” he does not say, that she had come; when she had come the sun was rising, but when she was coming it was yet dark. Ah Doctor, if you think to overthrow Christianity by nibbling at such things as this, you are sadly mistaken.

I have thus gone over all your objections. You cannot say that I have omitted one single objection. I have defended every point you have attacked; and while I have done so, I have also shewn you, that even though much that I have defended were indefensible, still Christianity would shew itself that religion, against which, founded as it is on a rock, the gates of hell cannot prevail. I submit my observations to your candour, trusting that you will read them with candour and with a sincere and earnest love of truth, and not of victory.



## DOCTOR TO THE PRIEST.

SIR,

March 10, 1824.

WERE the correspondence that has now passed between us submitted to the judgment of a few unprejudiced minds, I have little doubt, notwithstanding your confidence, but their decision would be, that, upon rational grounds, christianity cannot be maintained. I have told you repeatedly, that, without coming to the principles of nature, our discussions would be endless, and you have all along studiously avoided this particular scene of action. When you talk of events happening contrary to the general laws of the universe, and say that there is nothing *impossible* with God, you are driven to the *dernier* resort, that all theologians have recourse to when surrounded with perplexities. Converse with a Hindoo, a Turk, or a Christian, they have, upon this question, all the same answer. When I condescended to enter upon the disputed points in the history of christianity, I did it merely with the view to shew you that though averse to enter such a bewildered and boundless tract of jarring opinion, I was still willing to continue the correspondence while I thought I could unveil to you the inconsistencies that exist in the detail of the christian religion itself. Your answers will plainly prove to what extent this has been done; and, though I am not in a manner bound to reply to you, after your thus avoiding the only plan by which any rational explanation can take place, I will, however, as your epistle is very luminous and abounds with a great deal of determined confidence, give you in reply a few observations.

Notwithstanding all that has been said, you are yet inclined to believe in the marvellous and cling strenuously to the absurdity of the sun standing still. I must, indeed, say that he who contends for the belief of this *miracle*, is truly ignorant of the "mighty mechanism of nature." The sun being the centre of the system, shews, at once, the foolishness of the assertion; even granting your way of it, if any phenomena had taken place similar to what you suppose, it must have been the earth that ceased in its diurnal motion, an event which would have produced a derangement in our globe, that would have overwhelmed the waters upon the land, and convulsed in ruin every city and habitable spot in the world. You certainly have strange ideas of the supreme being when you justify the horrid barbarities of the Israelites, a people that were considered by all the enlightened nations around them, a savage race, and who had no more right to invade the land of Canaan than the Spaniards had to overrun the beautiful provinces of Mexico and Peru. It was under the mask of religion that Pizarro committed

his bloody massacres, so was it under the same influence that Moses carried his murderous intentions against the ill-fated Canaanites.

If you choose to assent that it pleased the Deity to make these Jewish barbarians the executioners of his vengeance against the neighbouring nations, it appears very strange that that deity would have made his son descend from such a set of miscreants, who, by your own account, must be considered in no other light than common hangmen.

Your contrast of Jesus with the balloon, really is too much. If you would study science more and superstition less, you would save yourself from appearing ridiculous. The principles of natural philosophy would have led you to treat the subject very differently. I know of no power in nature that could make Jesus ascend beyond the boundaries of a certain distance. But pray, where is that heaven which you so confidently talk of? For my part, I cannot conceive in what region it exists; it is assuredly not in the moon, and, if we place it in the highest fixed star, Jesus must, indeed, have a very long and fatiguing journey to undergo. Astronomy teaches us that a cannon ball, flying at the rate of 1000 miles an hour, would not reach the star Sirius in 7000 years. He is, therefore, not half way on his journey. Moreover, what a pretty figure a man would make, setting out upon his travels with his body covered with wounds, the situation in which our *aeronaut* must have been previous to his flight; and to which he particularly alludes when he tells his friend Thomas to thrust his hand into his side to convince him that he alone was the crucified Jesus.

The story about the rams' horns really excited my risible faculties, but the trumpets are still more laughable. What a fine idea it would be to suppose that a modern general would advance before the walls of such a town as Badajos, and make the garrison surrender by demolishing the batteries with the procession of a few priests, marching thrice round them, and sounding rams' horns or trumpets.

You speak about wrong translation you admit then, that it is wrong. This is sufficient to invalidate the whole story, for it shows that is liable to error and can never be divine, coming through the hands of ignorant or perhaps interested translators. About the conception which receives the name of immaculate, it requires only common sense to see its absurdity. I will appeal to any one, if, throughout the whole of my observations, any warmth exists, which can come under the temperament which you call enthusiastic; but, I confess, when I see such a subject gravely mentioned, I can scarcely forbear deploring that state of mind which listens to such contemptible foolery.

When upon this subject, as well as others, I certainly must say, that you display, in a great degree, your extreme ignorance of the laws of nature. One can scarcely be serious upon such a topic. The plan which you would approve of, sanctions something like adultery. Why did the Holy Ghost fix upon a woman who was to be engaged in the "holy bands of matrimony?"<sup>1</sup> There surely were in the neighbourhood plenty of other virgins. In any shape that you choose to have it, you must set this tale down as truly disgusting; and when you consider that for a long period it engaged the attention of the *pious* fathers of christianity, we cannot do otherwise than think, that human intellect, in these ages, was truly in a deplorable and degraded state. It was long a disputed point, whether, in this *mysterious* copulation, semen was emitted by Mary, a question that gave rise to many of those violent agitations that prevailed in the councils of the church, and which formed the doctrine concerning the hypostatical union of persons in Jesus. Such offensive folly originated from men who received the epithet of *learned*, and who are, in the history of christianity, still dignified with the splendid titles of Saints and Bishops; but these holy men begin to appear, now-a-days, in their real character. We can look with contempt upon such stuff, though we, doubtless, must lament that many young men are yet doomed, during their scholastic education, to wander through these mazes of polemical divinity, losing their precious time and perverting their judgments, while they might be devoted to the enquiry of something more rational. To return, however, to matters that form a more important appearance, as far as what you consider the props of christianity, I have to observe, that in my last I demanded of you to give a clear proof of the ascension of Jesus. In this, I must say there is every evidence that you have completely failed; but I feel no surprise in such a failure, I knew you could offer no proof; yet, as you had confidently talked upon the truth of these things, I gave you an opportunity, lest you might have possessed some knowledge of them that other men have not. Now, the amount of your knowledge is, that you do not bring forward one witness to

<sup>1</sup> It is said that Mary was betrothed to Joseph the carpenter. Now, betrothing in India is equal to marriage in England; for sexual intercourse was allowed, and the appearance of pregnancy consummated the marriage. If there was no pregnancy, there was no marriage, and the parties separated if they chose. Mary could not, therefore, be a virgin; for there were no betrothed virgins in India. There is a precisely similar custom practised in Portland, on the coast of Dorsetshire, and is called "*Portland Custom.*"



attest the alleged fact. In place of this, you refer me to Matthew's notions upon the subject. What have I or any one else to do with his belief? He never asserts that he saw Jesus ascend, and therefore, his believing it cannot establish satisfactorily the disputed point. You next advert to John, as a proof that Jesus did ascend, and you say, that this disciple records discourses which allude to our Lord's removal from the earth. This, however, is not even the shadow of proof. Nothing is more absurd than this. You really seem to be very ignorant of what should prove a fact, when you refer me to the allusions and belief of men that did not witness it themselves. You next quote John xx. 17, as a proof of the ascension, where Jesus says to Mary that he is not ascended, "but go to my brethren," &c. &c. This however, is really weak, and displays a superficial acquaintance with such subjects, at which I feel somewhat astonished. It is, indeed, worse than the allusions just mentioned. Here is Jesus declaring himself that he is to ascend, to a woman whose conduct is very suspicious, and who latterly informs John about the business. This man, therefore, must be considered the third person. If you receive this as proof, you may believe in any thing however absurd or ridiculous. You bring in Paul's evidence as you do that of Matthew and John, and next claim assistance from Peter; but, unhappily, you go to the wrong book for his proof. When you give a reference to the Acts of the Apostles, do you imagine that Peter wrote these Acts? If you do, I must say as the Bishop of Llandaff said to Thomas Paine, "that you are a very unfit hand to comment upon the scriptures." But, to be more to the point, where is it that Peter says in his epistles that he saw Jesus ascend? And, as for Stephen, he has no declaration whatever. The circumstance of my quoting Mark does not affect the event in question. If I am mistaken, I have only substituted one name for another. Matthew says, that Jesus commanded them to meet him in Galilee; and Luke, in the Acts, says, that he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, and continues in his gospel to assert, that Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, which, by the bye, is only two miles from the city. Now, here is a story truly irreconcilable; for the place that Matthew alludes to, where he was commanded to meet Jesus, is no less than eighty miles distant from Jerusalem. This is inconsistency indeed, and I leave you to put together in a better form this disjointed inspiration. If you mend it, I will find more work for you, for the whole is one mass of glaring absurdity and contradiction.

With regard to the resurrection, you still are deficient in what should constitute the principal proof; viz, men who

saw Jesus in the sepulchre, and who also saw him rise. The guards give no account of the story; what is said about them is merely related by Matthew, and would never be received for evidence in any court of justice. Luke and Mark differ in their account of the inside scene of the sepulchre. The one says that the women saw two young men in shining garments, while the other affirms, that they only beheld one young man clothed in white. Peter and John declare, they saw only the linen clothes lying in two parcels. Excepting this trifling difference, upon which it is not my intention to dwell, these three evangelists agree exactly in proving that no person was present when Jesus rose from the sepulchre.

Your remarks about the three days and three nights are sufficiently trifling. The type of Jonah, being three days and three nights in the whale's belly, is well understood to apply to the passage that the son of man shall be in the grave the same period of time. There can be no evasion regarding this, and I really wonder at you calling it a manner of speech only well known to those to whom it was delivered. If the meaning of it does not imply *three times twenty-four hours*, then I maintain that language has no meaning. In short, the whole of your revelation hangs upon these two hypothesis, the resurrection and the ascension, and to prove that either took place, you have to do what you vainly thought you had done.

I can assure you I am not so easily satisfied with stories that are evidently manufactured to serve a particular purpose, and which have all the character of being second-handed. I would prefer the testimony of eye-witnesses where matters of fact are in question; but, after all, if you feel contented, I can only conclude in the language of a certain Pope, when performing a *holy* ceremony wherein he knew he was deceiving the people, "*He who wishes to be deceived, let him be deceived*." I should have given you the expression in the original, but this I suppose is of no moment. With the expectation of hearing from you, believe me

Yours always &c.

<sup>2</sup> The story here alluded to is, perhaps, not generally known. It is related of a certain Pope, that one day, while dispensing an ordinance where holy water was used, the multitude was so great that the vessel became dry. Without ceremony his *Holiness* retired, and nearly filling it with his own urine, ultimately applied this saline production to the heads of the poor ignorant dupes, exclaiming to his Cardinals that surrounded him, "*He who wishes to be deceived, let him be deceived.*"

(*To be continued.*)